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HOW TO REST.

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WHILE it is true that wealthy and well-to-do Americans require more rest for their wearied minds and bodies than do any other people in the world, it is equally certain that they almost uniformly fail to meet the necessities of the system in this respect.

After eight months of the year passed in exciting occupations or extravagant dissipations, they begin to talk of relaxation and repose, and straightway make preparations for a change of base, deceiving themselves with the idea that they are contemplating rest, while in reality intending to seek fresh fields on which to display their capacity for making money, and new varieties of pleasurable excesses on which to spend it. Such people have no idea of what rest really is. They seem to think that the one essential is change of air, and that if they go to the seashore or the mountains for three or four months in every year, it makes no difference how they employ their time while there, and that when they return to their ordinary routine of town or city life, they are completely fortified against the ill consequences of any excesses, whether of business or pleasure, into which they choose to plunge.

Now, change of air may be a very good thing, or it may not. A great many persons, so far from being benefited by it, are soon made sensible of the fact that it does not agree with them. The healthiest people in the world, such as the Swiss, the Norwegians, or the Scotch Highlanders, never get any change of air except such as comes to them from the winds that blow over their native mountains; and the like is true of the people of a great many portions of our own country. Common-sense teaches us that change of air such as attends upon removing from a healthy to an unhealthy locality must be injurious.

Still we may assume that the great majority of the people who give up their city life in the summer for the seashore or the mountains are not injured by the change of air. City air is generally about as bad as any that exists on the face of the globe, and it is scarcely possible for any one to be otherwise than benefited by getting out beyond the range of its influence.

But it is rest which we have to consider, and I propose to show that as it is ordinarily sought for in this country by the majority of the people who make the greatest pretensions of seeking it, it is almost, if not completely, unattainable by the methods they employ.

There are various kinds of rest. A person whose occupation is chiefly carried on by the use of his brain rests that organ when he changes his work to physical labor. Thus, a student who spends eight hours a day in intense mental application derives immense benefit, not only to his brain, but to his whole system, by a brisk walk of two or three hours or a like period employed in chopping wood. In such a case as this there is no complete rest for the body; it is simply a change of labor from one kind to another kind. It amounts to nothing more than a proper exercise for the mental and physical systems, and if accompanied with seven or eight hours' sleep and five or six hours for eating and amusement, might be carried on indefinitely in any ordinary healthy locality. The body does not require absolute rest, and, as a matter of fact, it never gets it; for even in sleep there is a not inconsiderable functional activity of various organs going on.

Such a student as I have referred to would receive great advantage from going to the woods, or the mountains, or the seashore for the summer, not to lie down in a hammock or to loll on the sand, but to take his books with him, preferably devoted to subjects different from those that he has studied in the city, and to exercise his muscles by rowing a boat or hunting for natural-history specimens on land or sea, instead of working in a gymnasium or walking up and down Broadway and Fifth Avenue. Such a person not only alters the character of his mental and physical labor, but he does it with such advantages as are to be derived from change of air and scene, and they are by no means inconsiderable.

Now, this is not rest: on the contrary, it is work, and very hard work, too; but no one can doubt that that student would return

to his regular pursuits with a mind and body invigorated and capable of doing better things than when he left the city.

Suppose, on the other hand, after having worked hard with his brain and his muscles for nine or ten months, he concludes that he ought to have complete rest, and goes to some secluded spot where the air is unexceptionable, and passes his time in comparative mental and physical inaction. He reads trashy novels, talks with trashy men and women, swings lazily in a hammock, goes to bed at nine o'clock and gets up at nine in the morning, and returns to town with a surplus of adipose tissue and his mind and body enfeebled by disease. The mere act of getting into the traces again and resuming his work is irksome to him and is accomplished with difficulty. His mental faculties act imperfectly and the product of their labor lacks its usual finish. A slight amount of mental exertion makes his head ache; he turns to his wood-chopping or his gymnasium or his walks on Broadway or Fifth Avenue, and he finds that an amount of muscular exercise that he formerly endured with pleasure now makes him puff and blow and causes his muscles to ache. Many days elapse before he gets into the rut and all the organs of his body run smoothly again.

It is still worse with the ordinary man of business who has, at the same time, as he thinks, a position in society to maintain. What he seeks is some place within easy range of his financial or mercantile headquarters, and in which he and his family can continue the festivities of their city life. There is no essential alteration in their mode of existence except what they get from change of air and scene, and this does not necessarily imply rest. Letters and telegrams relating to business are received hourly. The Stock-Exchange quotations, the state of the markets, come as systematically to Newport or Saratoga as they do to Wall Street or Broadway. The mind pursues its endless course of speculation as to the increase or loss of wealth. The dinners, the balls, are as elegant and as frequent as they were when the family occupied their mansion in Fifth Avenue.

The requirements of fashion as regards dress are quite as rigorous as they were during the winter at the height of the city season, if not more so, and fully as much time is taken from that which ought to be devoted to sleep in order that both body and mind may be recuperated. Is it a wonder, therefore, that

the men and women who pursue this sort of life, in which there is a ceaseless round of business and dissipation, should be worn and haggard, be nervous and hysterical, the victims of nervous prostration, ceasing to live long before they have attained to the "three score and ten years" which the Bible allots as the ordinary span of human life?

The fact is that the average American is incapable of self-amusement. He requires to be entertained; he is essentially gregarious; the idea of going into the woods or to the seashore or the mountains by himself, or at most with a congenial companion, is in the highest degree repugnant to him. He loathes that privacy and seclusion from the eyes of his fellows which it would appear every well-ordered person ought to desire. He likes glare and excitement and turmoil and noise. When he goes into a sedately-lighted room, in which he only wishes to sit down and rock to and fro with a cigar in his mouth, the first thing he does is to turn on all the light. A quiet town, one suited for repose of mind, he speaks of as a "graveyard." He wants to be in the "swim," as he calls it, all the time. A day without his newspaper in which he can read of the state of the markets, and of all the crimes and scandals which have occurred throughout the world in the past twenty-four hours, is to him a day lost.

It is true that matters are different with those who are not in business for themselves, but who are working for others. When they take a holiday, they leave their business behind them and spend the two or three weeks allowed them in actual recreation. They are not going to bother themselves with the state of the markets. It does not concern them especially whether New York Central falls or rises a point or two, and when they come back to their stuffy little offices, in which the light of day has to be eked out with gas or electricity, they can talk of the tramps they have had in the Adirondacks or of the bluefish they have caught in the Great South Bay. However, with very many young Americans the time comes when they feel that they must shake off the trammels which bind them to another man's service, and then it is that the natural process of decay, which exists in all of us, acquires the greatest degree of rapidity in them, for they rush at once into the mode of life which their business superiors have followed and upon which they have long been eagerly waiting to enter.

With women in what may be called the higher walks of life it is even worse than it is with men, for there is almost nothing to which they can turn for amusement or employment outside of the frivolities of society. Their education is so conducted that when they leave school they have a smattering of a good many things, but a solid, substantial knowledge of almost nothing. How many so-called society women did any one ever see who could take a paper-pad and a pencil and go out into the fields and sketch from nature? And yet there is scarcely a well-bred English woman who cannot do this, and do it well. How many have anything more than the most superficial knowledge of music, and do we not know that even this is forgotten as soon as they leave school? How many of them know anything of English literature, or of any other literature except that evanescent French variety which, from their imperfect knowledge of the language, they can barely comprehend, and which it would be better for them not to know at all? For such people there is really nothing else than to go from the dinners, balls, and parties of the city to the dinners, balls, and parties of Newport or other fashionable summer resorts. Excitement of some kind they must have. Without it life is a burden to them.

In short, a man or a woman is to be managed in respect to rest in very much the same way that a farmer manages his field. The latter knows the advantage of a succession of crops. He knows that if he plants cabbages every successive year in the same piece of ground, he will, in a short time, have very poor cabbages and very poor ground; whereas, by changing from one thing to another, the product is better and the earth is not deteriorated. He knows also how much his land is improved by allowing it to lie fallow every now and then. Men and women, like the fields of the earth, require change, and, like them, they require rest; and these objects can never be attained in the way that the average American sets out to get them.

WILLIAM A. HAMMOND.